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EDUCATION WEEK

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Against All Odds

N.C. District Affirms Tying Pay to School, Student Performance

By Daniel Gursky

OXFORD, N.C.—Every day, Michael Ward wears a button that says "BAU," overlaid with a red slash, the universal symbol for "no."

The button means "No more business as usual"—an apt description of public education here in rural Granville County, where Mr. Ward serves as the superintendent of schools.

This school year, the district showed the tenacity of its commitment to Mr. Ward's slogan. Its teachers, bucking the prevailing sentiment of their colleagues throughout the state, voted overwhelmingly last September to stick with a district plan that bases extra pay for school employees on meeting individual and schoolwide performance goals.

With North Carolina facing its worst fiscal crisis since the Depression, the state legislature had given school districts a choice: Teachers could vote to keep the differentiated-pay plans their districts had developed a year earlier as part of a sweeping education-reform initiative; votes for such a plan meant teachers had no guarantee of a year-end bonus. Or districts could temporarily scrap their pay plans and use the money for across-the-board bonuses of up to $550 per certified employee.

The lawmakers had devised the alternatives because the state was unable to raise teacher salaries or fully fund the re-

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Julian Harrison

"If salary is tied to improvement . . . you're going to work hard to make sure it happens," Granville County's superintendent, Michael Ward, maintains.

Learnfare Fails To Boost Attendance, New Study Finds

Report on Wis. Program Is Criticized by Officials

By Deborah L. Cohen

Learnfare, Wisconsin's pioneering effort to link public assistance to school attendance, has not resulted in improved attendance among students whose families are on welfare, the first comprehensive study of the program has found.

The federally commissioned study, released this month, has drawn criticism from state and federal officials, who question some of its research methods and argue that some of the data do not support its conclusions. The Wisconsin secretary of health and social services also has called it "biased" from a liberal perspective.

Nevertheless, the study by the Employment and Training Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is believed to be the most thorough examination so far of a program linking welfare benefits to school attendance, a concept already adopted in Ohio and being eyed by several other states.

It also comes at a time when Wisconsin is considering expanding Learnfare, and as a number of states are looking at other welfare reforms aimed at modifying behaviors seen as perpetuating the cycle of dependency. *(See related story below.)*

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Calif. Town Declares Itself a Slum in Quest For State School Aid

By Lonnie Harp

Ask the Hemet, Calif., chamber of commerce to portray the community, and you will get a glowing tribute to a quiet town of about 50,000 located in the heart of a fertile valley. It is the home of the annual Ramona Pageant, a springtime play reviving romantic visions of Old California. Once a retirement community, it is being redefined by an influx of younger residents.

That description is a far cry, though, from the label assigned late last year by the city council. By a majority vote, the panel declared that Hemet is a blight zone—in blunter terms, a citywide slum.

While that characterization of Hemet has raised the hackles of local boosters, some Southern California school administrators say it is nothing to complain about.

Instead, educators describe the step as just one result of a growing search for wrinkles and loopholes in the state tax code set off by the combined pressures of state budget cuts, an underfunded state school-building authority, and one of the nation's stric-

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'Entrepreneurial Spirit' Is the Key To Reviving Schools, Book Argues

By Lynn Olson

Forcing schools to compete for students and money holds the key to unlocking the "bureaucratic gridlock" that hamstrings public education, a new book released last week argues.

Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector maintains that confidence in government has fallen to record lows because top-down, centralized bureaucracies—including those that characterize public education—cannot meet the demands of a rapidly changing information society.

"They accomplished great things in their time," the authors David Osborne and Ted Gaebler write, "but somewhere along the line they got away from us. They became bloated, wasteful, ineffective."

The solution, they argue, is to make fundamental changes in the way government provides services—ranging from schooling to health care—based on a new set of principles, which they dub "entrepreneurial government."

Such governments are "lean, decentralized, and innovative," the authors write.

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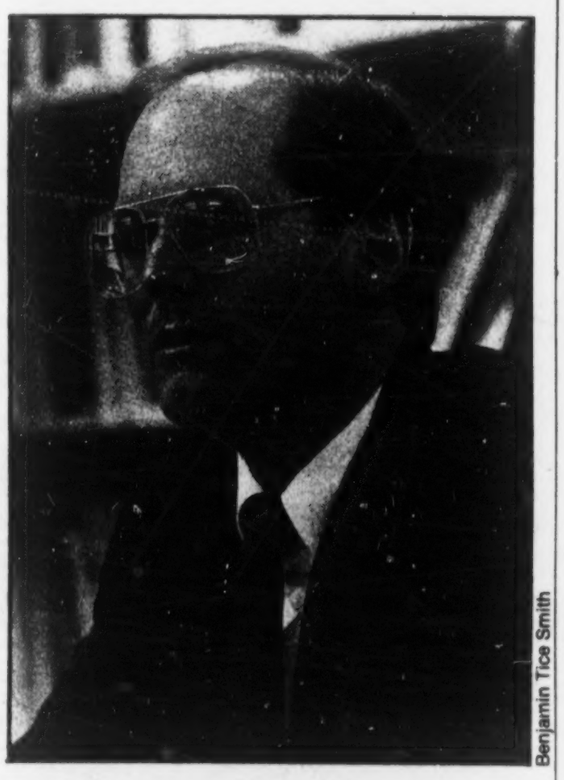

Benjamin Tice Smith

David Osborne believes the key to improving public education and other government institutions is to replace "bureaucratic gridlock" with a more "entrepreneurial spirit."

States Move To Link Welfare Benefits to Personal Behavior

By Deborah L. Cohen

Seeking to stem rising welfare rolls, cut spending, and champion "mainstream values," several states have plunged into a highly controversial, yet largely untested, area of welfare reform: linking benefits to personal behavior.

In its most basic form, the notion was embedded in the landmark 1988 federal welfare-reform law, the Family Support Act, which required recipients to pursue education, job training, or employment in exchange for their welfare benefits.

But the recent spate of state proposals—most of which will require legislative approval or federal waivers in order to be implemented—extends beyond the world of work.

This new generation of proposals is seeking to hold sway over such behaviors as childbearing, marriage, school attendance, living arrangements, and health care.

In recent months, several states have either proposed or begun debating such welfare reforms, and New Jersey last month became the first state to enact a measure denying welfare mothers additional benefits

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Chicago teachers receive a $1-million grant to help them become more effective in the classroom.

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Even an intensive campaign cannot convince many parents that their schools have problems.

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Recipients of federal impact aid are gearing up to redesign the often-maligned program next year.

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A "summit" of education leaders voiced support last week for recommendations in a report on gender bias, but the Education Department's research chief is disputing its findings. **Page 5.**

Food for Thought
A fledgling volunteer group is asking American schoolchildren to raise money for emergency food relief for their economically devastated Russian counterparts.
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Good Mortality News
The infant-mortality rate for babies born in the United States dropped to a new low in 1989, 9.8 deaths per 1,000 live births, according to federal statistics.
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What Is Science?
Critics are asking whether a pioneering Afro-centric science-curriculum document in Portland, Ore., actually espouses "pseudoscientific" beliefs.
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A Suburban Myth
A longitudinal study of student achievement in science and math indicates that enrollment in a suburban school system does not appear to predict academic or career success. **Page 11.**

Creationism Settlement
The California education department has settled a lawsuit brought by a Christian graduate school stemming from a dispute over the school's creationism-based curriculum.
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Ind. Board Bill Clears
Backed by the state's teachers' unions, a bill to establish an autonomous, teacher-majority board to license and certify teachers has cleared the Indiana legislature.
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ACROSS THE NATION

NATIONAL

Survey Finds Voters Will Watch Education Platforms This Fall

American voters will be taking careful stock of Congressional candidates' education platforms this fall, according to the results of a survey conducted last month by a Republican polling firm.

Public Opinion Strategies Inc. of Alexandria, Va., polled 1,000 Americans ages 18 and older on Jan. 29 and 30, following President Bush's State of the Union Address.

The survey found that, on a scale of 1 to 10 (from "not at all important" to "extremely important"), respondents rated a candidate's position on education an 8.7, the highest rating given in 12 platform areas. Education, in fact, scored higher even than a candidate's position on the economy and jobs, health care, crime and drugs, and Social Security and Medicare.

On an open-ended question on the "most important problem facing the United States today," most respondents expressed concern over the recession (28 percent) and unemployment (21 percent). Education (4 percent) tied for fourth place with drugs and poverty/homelessness.

Respondents in their mid-20's through 40's showed the strongest concern for education, the survey found.

The results show that "education is still a source of considerable interest and concern to a large number of key voter groups," said Glen Bolger, a partner in the polling firm. "It is of special interest given that this is a Presidential election year."

While "education is not an issue that by itself can carry a candidate to victory," Mr. Bolger noted, "neither can they afford to ignore it." ■

STATES

New York State Reports Drop in G.E.D. Takers After Fee Imposed

The number of New York State residents taking the General Educational Development test was cut nearly in half after the state began charging a $25 fee, according to figures from the state education department.

Citing budget problems, the state began charging the fee on Sept. 1, 1991. During the last four months of 1991, a total of 11,300 people took the high-school-equivalency test. During the same period in 1990, 21,612 people took the test.

The decrease in test-takers began immediately after the fee was imposed, Commissioner of Education Thomas Sobol announced this month. Only 880 people took the 7½-hour series of examinations in September, compared with 6,271 people in August.

While the number for December—3,682—was considerably higher, Mr. Sobol said, the number of test-takers still is below expectations.

The department says it must continue to charge the fee unless it receives some $1.3 million from the state legislature to run the program.

The department is also weighing plans to administer the test free of charge to people on public assistance or in job-training programs.

Crowded Okla. Districts Lose $1.6 Million in State Funds

Eighty-three Oklahoma school districts will lose a total of more than $1.6 million in state aid this year because they failed to comply with state class-size mandates, officials announced this month.

The Tulsa school district—the state's largest—will lose $587,806 this year, the biggest single penalty assessed against districts that failed to meet restrictions on class size mandated in House Bill 1017, the Education Reform and Funding Act of 1990.

The Tulsa fine represents slightly less than 1 percent of the district's $63.6 million in state aid this year. The 40,000-student district had 281 students in classes that exceeded the maximum size, education-department figures show.

The Mustang school district in Canadian County ranked second with $222,680 in penalties, or about 2.3 percent of its $9.5 million in state-aid monies. A total of 106 children in the 6,000-student district were in classes that exceeded the maximum sizes.

The measure set maximum class sizes for the 1991-92 school year at 23 students for kindergarten, 21 for grades 1-3, and 22 for grades 4-6. All elementary grades must meet a class-size ceiling of 20 by the 1993-94 school year.

This was the second year of such penalties. In 1991, penalties totaling nearly $2.9 million were levied against 98 districts—10 of which saw them forgiven because of a now-closed "loophole" in the law, education-department officials said.

The Tulsa and Mustang districts were among those 10, the officials noted.

■ **The Kentucky state school board will ask the state legislature to allow school districts to convert five instructional days into teacher-training periods if they submit an acceptable training plan to state officials.**

The board approved the proposal this month after educators had complained that they were not adequately prepared to implement some of the reform programs spawned by the state's 1990 landmark school-reform law.

The state plan, which would trim the number of instructional days in the school year to 170, won out over a proposal to add five training days to the year. The latter approach would have required increased funding.

State officials said the plan would make the extra training time an option only during the next two years and would consider only training plans that focus directly on the state's reform efforts.

"With the massive changes in direction, the feedback we're getting is that people cannot absorb all of the changes within the present four days of inservice training," Jim Parks, a spokesman for the state education department, said.

"This action was taken with some reluctance, but, given the budget circumstances and the amount of change we're expecting, we have to have more retraining," Mr. Parks added. ■

'Bucks for Baldness'

A shave-and-a-haircut costs more than two bits these days at Milford (N.Y.) Central High School—in fact, it can run as high as $10,000.

Just before winter break, some Milford students jokingly challenged the school librarian, Phil Durkin, to do something outrageous to raise money for a trust fund to buy library books.

When he agreed to shave his head if they raised $500, the students realized the potential delight of combining fund raising with adult humiliation.

The "Bucks for Baldness, Baldness for Books" drive crystalized during a recent winter-break party at the school. A total of nine educators pledged to shave for bucks, including the school psychologist, principal, and the district superintendent, who upped the ante to $1,000, $2,000 and $5,000, respectively.

Peter Steiner

Mr. Durkin, who looks forward to resembling a Buddhist monk, says students have raised more than $900 in pledged funds and that a few have even shaved their heads in solidarity with the soon-to-be-shorn.

The fund raiser ends Feb. 28, when Milford students and staff members will assemble for a group shearing. A cosmetology student will play Delilah to the school's Samsons, while local radio and television stations record the fateful moment.

To Mr. Durkin, the crowning glory of the campaign came when Republican state Senator Jim Seward signed an agreement to lose his locks if the students raised $10,000.

"I want all the Democrats in the county to donate something," Mr. Durkin says. "That'll teach a Republican to open his mouth!" —S.K.G.

Photopress

While pursuing her own research project on students' "opportunity to learn," Floraline I. Stevens is also prodding N.C.E.S. researchers to produce materials more useful to teachers and administrators in the field. "My whole input has been how to make documents user-friendly so they are utilized by school districts," she says.

ers to "chew on" a particular problem for six weeks in the summer.

While all the efforts so far have been highly regarded, Mr. Shavelson says, the senior-fellows program is perhaps the most prestigious.

To select senior fellows, he says, the federal agency discusses with the association the topic it wants help for, and the association identifies a leading scholar in the field.

Researchers at the senior-scholar level are usually invited to apply for fellowships, Mr. Shavelson explains.

"By the time you get to that level, if you don't get a phone call, you don't apply," he says. "People at that level aren't looking for work."

The first senior fellow at the N.S.F. is Michael Huberman, a professor of education at the University of Geneva, who is developing a plan for disseminating research findings, as well as holding workshops on dissemination for staff members of the foundation.

At the N.C.E.S., the first senior fellow was James W. Guthrie, a professor of education at the University of California at Berkeley and a co-director of Policy Analysis for California Education, or PACE, a highly regarded research consortium in that state.

During the 1990-91 academic year, Mr. Guthrie helped develop a strategic plan for the statistics center at a time when a number of reports, such as that of the Special Study Panel on Education Indicators, proposed substantial changes in federal collection of education data.

"He helped us think through what we would do with the round of recommendations given to us," says Mr. Elliott.

In the second year, Mr. Shavelson says, the N.C.E.S. was looking for a "consumer" of data who could help the agency improve its reporting capabilities.

The association selected Ms. Stevens, the Los Angeles schools' research chief. She also has experience with national issues as a member of the study panel on indicators and the Board on International Comparative Studies in Education, a National Academy of Sciences panel that oversees U.S. participation in cross-national studies.

Ms. Stevens says her selection represents a long-overdue recognition of the fact that not all research is conducted at a university.

"What it has done is brought legitimacy to the notion that school researchers do have qualifications and knowledge, and can work at a government agency to provide information," she says. "Normally, we don't get tapped for those things."

Bringing the 'Real World'

For her research project, Ms. Stevens chose to work on an issue that had occupied her attention in Los Angeles, as well as on the National Academy board: developing a way to determine whether students have had the "opportunity to learn" the material on which they are tested.

"How can students do well on any assessment," she says, "if they had not been exposed to the content the assessment is developed for?"

Such a measure, she says, would indicate not only whether the material had been covered in the classroom, but also how well teachers had provided instruction.

The measures would be particularly important for low-income and minority students, she says, who often have the least-skilled teachers.

In setting about determining how to construct such a measure, Ms. Stevens says, she began by surveying large districts to find out if they collect such data.

The survey found that "local school districts seem not to have looked at this as an important element in relation to student academic achievement at this point in time," Ms. Stevens says.

"All school districts have this capacity," she says. "Very few do it."

But her work has put the issue on the N.C.E.S. agenda, Mr. Elliott says. In fact, the agency and the Council of Chief State School Officers have scheduled a conference on the topic for next week.

"Flo influenced our thinking," Mr. Elliott says. "She made sense, and made more clear this is a direction we ought to be moving. It was not one we were initially enthusiastic about."

Ms. Stevens has also helped the agency by bringing to the table the perspective of a consumer of data, the acting commissioner says.

As an example, Ms. Stevens notes that she has pressed the N.C.E.S. researchers to define in their reports technical language that policymakers may not understand.

Without such definitions, she points out, district research directors may be reluctant to present information from the reports to school-board members who need it.

"My whole input has been how to make documents user-friendly so they are utilized by school districts," she says.

She also points out that she has served as a liaison between N.C.E.S. staff members and researchers and practitioners.

"I have brought the real world to the N.C.E.S.," Ms. Stevens says. ■

bring to this study?

A. I come from several different perspectives. I am an education historian. I'm also a member of the Institute for Social Research at Michigan. In that, I'm concerned with issues of research design and the quality of research as well. I also have experience in government before, as a consultant in the offices of adolescent-pregnancy and family-planning programs.

What I see as my immediate task is to look at the way research has been conducted, to assess it, [to look at both] the quality of the research and the kinds of research that have been conducted.

My history-of-education perspective is useful, but my social-science orientation and my previous experience may be equally important in this situation.

Q. What do you see as the top priorities for education research at this time?

A. There are a whole series of things. But I am looking more at what has been done, rather than assessing what should be done.

My sense is, [the priorities for research] are going to be addressed elsewhere, such as in [President Bush's] America 2000.

I'm not saying I won't look at them later.

Q. Assistant Secretary Ravitch has said that a major problem at O.E.R.I. is the dissemination of research, that there is a vast storehouse of information that is not getting out to practitioners. Do you share that view?

A. If you look at the research that has been done, and you look at the products the centers and laboratories are putting out, it varies. But I am not looking systematically at dissemination.

Q. Do you have any initial impressions of the quality of research at O.E.R.I.?

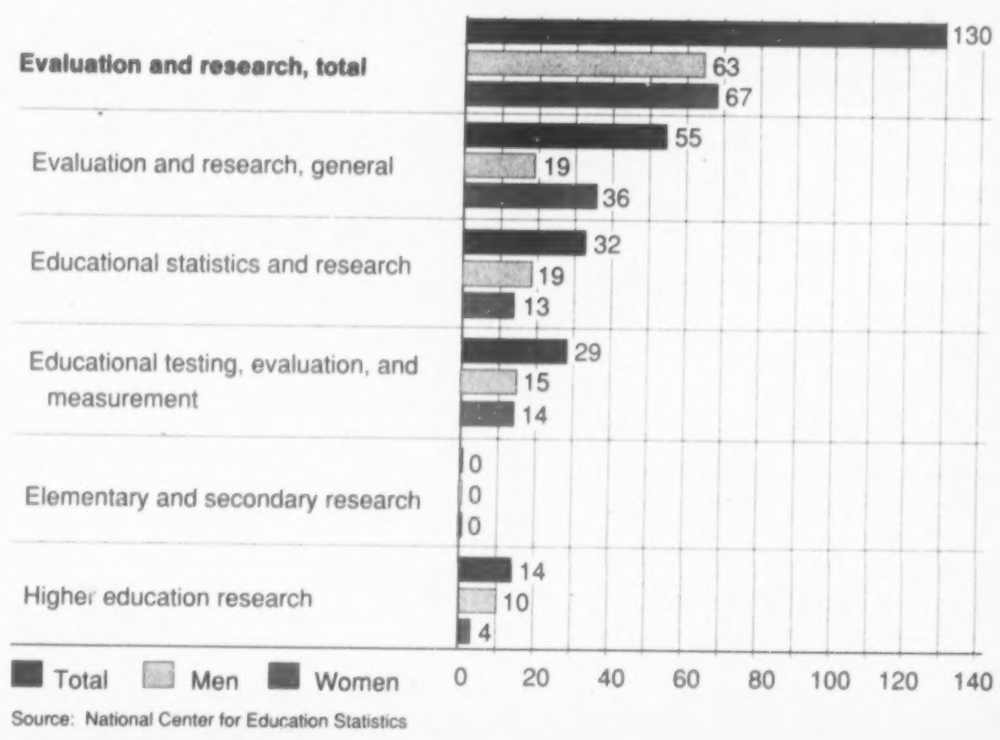
A. As in any series of research, there are some excellent things going on, and things that need to be improved.

I have been impressed at the high quality of people involved. But there are issues of methodology and strategy that have to be considered. ■

DIMENSIONS

Degrees in Education Research

Doctoral Degrees 1987-88



Source: National Center for Education Statistics